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NOAA Gulf of Mexico News

Fishery Management Council Will Convene an Organizational Meeting of the Special Management Zone Monitoring Team

Tampa, Florida – January 18, 2006 - The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) will convene a meeting of the Special Management Zone (SMZ) Monitoring Team to review requests from the states of Alabama and Mississippi. The Mississippi Gulf Fishing Banks, Inc. (MGFB) and the Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources/Marine Resources Division (ADCNR) have both petitioned the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Council) for Special Management Zone (SMZ) status for artificial reef areas off their respective coasts. SMZ status allows for the implementation of gear restrictions that are required when fishing within a zone. The ADCNR is requesting that fishing on artificial reefs designated as SMZs be limited to no more than 3 hooks per line. The MGFB is requesting fishing in SMZs be limited to no more than 3 hooks per line or to spearfishing gear. The reefs proposed for designation as SMZs are all located in the federal waters of the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ).

The monitoring team, established by the Council to provide technical advice regarding requests from petitioners, will review and discuss the adequacy of the reports, determine additional data needs, and review the SMZ process in general before proceeding with public workshops/hearings. The Monitoring Team will recommend to the Council the dates and locations of public workshops/hearings in each state to take public testimony regarding the petitions before preparing a report to the Council. The SMZ Monitoring Team will convene February 1 - 2, 2006 at the NMFS Panama City Lab, 3500 Delwood Beach Road, Panama City, Florida. The meeting will begin at 9 a.m. Wednesday, February 1, 2006, and conclude no later than 12 p.m. on Thursday, February 2, 2006. Copies of the agenda can be obtained by calling 813-348-1630.

Special Edition of Coastal Services Magazine

The January/February 2006 edition of *Coastal Services Magazine* reports on what coastal resource managers are doing to increase their communities' disaster resiliency. The special hazards-themed edition covers a broad range of examples of how coastal resource managers' unique skills and the data they use can help prepare the nation for floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and coastal erosion. *Coastal Services* is a trade journal published by the NOAA Coastal Services Center. Visit <http://www.csc.noaa.gov/magazine/> to subscribe and review current and past editions.

NOAA Assists FEMA with New Maps to Aid in Mississippi Recovery Effort

A new series of topographic maps will help property owners in Mississippi Gulf Coast counties rebuild to safer elevations. The topographic maps will simplify the process of determining the elevation a structure needs to be raised to meet Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) advisories. The maps were created through a partnership between FEMA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). To view the maps, visit <http://www.fema.gov/hazards/floods/recoverydata/index.shtm>. For more information, contact Doug.Marcy@noaa.gov.

NOAA'S Office of Coast Survey Launches Coast Pilot Disaster Impact Website

NOAA's Office of Coast Survey has established a special Disaster Impact Website to help speed the recovery efforts of 21 significant port facilities in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi impacted by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The purpose of the Disaster Impact Website is to help facilitate the recovery efforts by providing a resource for port facility managers to send critical information on navigation issues in their ports to NOAA's Coast Pilot Branch quickly. The Office of Coast Survey will promptly evaluate the information and post it on the website where mariners can quickly access the most current information available regarding the impacted ports. The data requested includes information on pilotage, channel, side and approach depths, anchorages, obstructions and hazards, bridge information, storage and supply facility information, overhead or surface bottom cabling, small craft facilities, status of wreck removals, and wharf information. NOAA will use this information for update reports and nautical charts where necessary. The website will remain active until all impacted ports have fully recovered. To view the website online visit <http://www.nauticalcharts.noaa.gov/nsd/cpgulf/cpgulf.htm> . For more information, contact Clifford.Cosgrove@noaa.gov.

In the Gulf States:

Alabama

FEMA Grants \$8.6 Million in Public Assistance to Restore Gaillard Island Levee/Berm System

MONTGOMERY, Ala. -- The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved a total of \$8,575,826 for Alabama State Port Authority to restore the levee/berm system protecting Gaillard Island on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay. The grant was awarded through FEMA's Public Assistance (PA) program. Gaillard is a man-made island owned and maintained by the Alabama State Port Authority. It was built to store de-water dredge spoils from Mobile Bay and provide a protected wildlife refuge for brown pelicans. On August 29, 2005 the tidal surge associated with Hurricane Katrina eroded and destroyed the island's levee/berm system. The damaged berm measures 31,680 feet in length. Damages to the berm system include: the 1,000' X 60' X 9' channel that provided access for heavy equipment; the wier box, or spoils liquid drainage system; and approximately 4' X 3' of rip rap lost along approximately 15,840 feet at the southwestern exposure of the island.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers notified the Alabama State Port Authority that the rebuilding of the berm will be performed in lifts of approximately six feet due to the poor compaction of available fill material. This will delay the completion of the project by more than two years and will require two additional mobilization/demobilization charges. The project will salvage approximately 364,320 cubic yards of existing spoils in the containment area and thus reduce the required fill from 1,077,120 cubic yards to 712,800 cubic yards.

Under the FEMA Public Assistance program, state and local governments and certain private non-profits are eligible for partial reimbursement for the repair or restoration of public infrastructure, as well as for the cost of debris removal and emergency measures taken following a federal disaster declaration. The

\$8.57 million grant represents a 75 percent federal share of the total project cost of \$11.4 million. The remaining 25 percent is from non-federal resources.

To be eligible for the grants, the cost to repair a particular site must exceed \$1,000 and the work must be required as a result of the disaster and located within the designated disaster area. The repair and restoration is the responsibility of the agency applying for the grant and must be necessary to protect life and property.

ADEM Celebrates World Wetlands Day

MONTGOMERY –The Alabama Department of Environmental Management is encouraging Alabamians to observe World Wetlands Day, Feb. 2, as part on the department’s ongoing efforts to safeguard the state’s natural resources. “We are pleased to participate in this annual celebration of the importance of wetlands to the environmental and ecological health of our state,” said ADEM Director Trey Glenn. “We support education, outreach and other efforts to conserve these valuable habitats.” The theme of this year’s World Wetlands Day is “Wetlands and water - supporting life, sustaining livelihoods.” Wetlands are vital elements of a watershed because they serve as the link between land and water resources. Often called “nature’s sponges,” wetlands offer important values and functions. Wetlands protect water quality by filtering out pollutants, provide natural flood control by absorbing excess water, buffer coastal areas from erosion, offer aesthetic and recreational opportunities, and provide a habitat for many diverse species of plants and animals. On the occasion of World Wetlands Day, ADEM invites all Alabamians to learn more about the values, benefits and diversity of the state’s wetlands.

ADEM Conference Promotes Water Quality Improvements

MONTGOMERY – More than 160 biologists, geologists, environmental engineers, municipal leaders and water quality specialists took part in the 17th Annual Non-point Source Pollution Conference, Jan. 25, at Montgomery’s Embassy Suites. The conference offered attendees a variety of updates on efforts supported by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management to achieve water quality improvements. It focused on a variety of projects such as stream restoration, low-impact development, education and outreach efforts and the development of watershed management plans that enable citizens and stakeholders to play an active role in protecting water quality. “We are proud of our partnerships with stakeholders who assist in the planning, implementation and success of these projects,” said ADEM Director, Trey Glenn. “Reducing non-point source pollution begins with every Alabama citizen doing the small things that produce a cumulative benefit to our state’s water resources.” Non-point source pollution is a major cause of water quality impairment across the nation. It occurs when storm water runoff from construction, agricultural or residential activities displace sediment and chemicals that subsequently move into waterways. For more information on ADEM’s efforts to reduce and prevent non-point source pollution, visit www.adem.state.al.us.

2006 Summer Educational Programs at the Dauphin Island Sea Lab

The Dauphin Island Sea Lab offers one of the most extensive summer marine science programs in the nation. With programs for everyone from graduate students to teachers to middle school students, the Sea Lab combines excellence in education with a beautiful location, right on the beaches of the Gulf of

Mexico. For more information on any of these programs, go to the Dauphin Island Sea Lab web site at http://press.disl.org/1_25_06dhpprog.html. Or call 251/861-2141.

Water Quality: Building the Case for Home Rule in Alabama

Mobile, AL. The Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (Mobile Bay NEP) will hold a meeting of community leaders on Monday, January 30, 2006 to examine environmental issues associated with home rule. Titled, Developing an Infrastructure for Improving Water Quality: Building a Case for Home Rule, the meeting will be held at the Daphne Civic Center from 1:00PM to 4:30PM. Presenters at the half-day event will include Mr. Buddy Sharpless, Executive Director, Association of County Commissions of Alabama; State Senator Bradley Byrne of Montrose, Alabama, Mr. Butch Ellis, County Attorney, Shelby County, Alabama; and the Honorable Lindsay Allison, Chair, Shelby County, Alabama Commission all of whom have experience with home rule issues.

The meeting is the first follow-up to the highly successful Coastal Alabama Planning Summit held in October 2005. This initial summit involved community leaders in visioning the environmental and economic needs of Coastal Alabama through 2025. Increased home rule was identified as a primary cross-cutting issue necessary for achieving a sustainable economy and environmental quality in coastal Alabama.

This January 30th assembly is to be the first in a series of follow-up meetings that address specific issue areas identified in the Coastal Planning Summit. The information generated from the meeting will be used to educate the community on how a greater level of home rule could facilitate local actions to improve water quality and related environmental issues. Other topics to be considered for similar follow-up meetings include transportation alternatives, regional planning/zoning, storm-water management, and point/non point source pollution among others identified by the Coastal Planning Summit and in the Mobile Bay NEP's Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan.

For additional information and to read the Executive Summary from the Coastal Planning Summit, please visit the Mobile Bay NEP website: www.mobilebaynep.com. For more information about this meeting, contact David Yeager or Roberta Swann at (251) 431-6409.

Study Reveals Losses of Submerged Grasses in Coastal Alabama

Mobile, AL. Submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) are under water plants that grow in relatively shallow waters along the coast. In a report prepared for the Mobile Bay National Estuary Program (Mobile Bay NEP), Barry Vittor and Associates reviewed historical SAV coverage in coastal Alabama and determined significant acreage loss in SAV has occurred since 1940.

In 2002, the Mobile Bay NEP commissioned the first aerial photographic baseline study for current SAV coverage in Coastal Alabama. Barry Vittor and Associates was contracted to produce aerial true color digital orthophotoquads along the coast. Certain photographic signatures indicate various plant species. Once identified in aerials, scientists then "ground-truth" their results by physically checking the plants in the field. Maps of SAV coverage were then created.

In a follow-up study, Barry Vittor and Associates then obtained historical aerial photosets of Mobile County from 1940 and Baldwin County from 1955 and 1966 to compare to the 2002 photosets. There is anecdotal information from long time residents and resource managers that SAV coverage was once far

more widespread in the Mobile estuary. What Vittor's group found was quite an impressive loss of submerged grasses. Between 1940 and 2002, areas in Mobile County decreased from 1924 acres to just 855 acres of SAV. Most of the loss was south of Dog River, 691 fewer acres along the western shore. Baldwin County analysis revealed a disturbing 88.3% loss between 1955 and 2002. The 1955 photoset revealed SAV from just north of Point Clear south to Bon Secour Bay. In 2002, no SAV were identified from that area. Between 1966 and 2002, the northeastern shore of Mobile Bay lost 328 acres or a 71% decrease.

Why worry about SAV? Submerged grasses are like underwater meadows, providing critical "nursery" habitat and food for the young of many commercially and recreationally important species of fish, shrimp and crabs. They can also act as wave attenuators and help hold sediment in place in normal weather conditions. In addition, plants act like sponges for various pollutants thus acting as water and sediment filters. SAV were identified by Mobile Bay area stakeholders as issues of concern within the Mobile Bay NEP's comprehensive plan.

Changes in estuarine grass distribution can occur due to many natural coastal and climatic cycles. Much of the year to year variation observed by local residents, resource managers, and researchers is still being studied. However, the overall decline in this highly valuable habitat is largely due to human activity altering areas previously capable of supporting SAV. Increased rates of sedimentation or scouring, hardening shorelines, and other development practices can alter the setting in which submerged grasses grow. Once altered, the plants fail to thrive and the habitat can eventually die. Boating activities as well as recreational trawling can also tear up bay bottoms. The decline of SAV may also correlate to declines in other important aquatic species.

Can submerged grasses be replanted like other plants? Unlike many other types of vegetation, SAV is very difficult to transplant successfully. Researchers and managers around the country work to understand the delicate balance these plants need in order to grow in controlled conditions and then thrive once transplanted to restoration sites. Many area organizations and agencies are working individually and through partnerships toward restoring SAV in coastal Alabama though success is yet to be achieved. Many of these groups work within the structure of the Mobile Bay NEP to address SAV loss and how it maybe restored. Final reports from both the 2002 baseline survey and 2005 historical SAV coverage are available in PDF file format on the Mobile Bay NEP website. Go to www.mobilebaynep.com and click on publications.

Florida

Rookery Bay Goes to the Birds

--Tours highlight species in their native habitat--

NAPLES – Rookery Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve today welcomed visitors to the Southwest Florida Birding Festival, allowing both beginners and experts to explore the bird life and environment of Southwest Florida. Continuing through the weekend, the second annual festival provides presentations, biology games, conservation lessons and birding trips for participants.

"Appreciating and preserving the rich bird life and natural habitat of Florida begins with knowledge," said Rookery Bay Reserve Manager Gary Lytton. "Bird watchers young and young at heart, from beginners to experts, will enjoy touring our birding 'hotspots'."

University of Massachusetts professor and author Donald Kroodsma, PhD, opened the event with a keynote address on bird vocalizations. Presentations by birding experts continue throughout the weekend, including basics on birding for beginners and using your computer to become a better birder. Fifteen speakers will inform participants on the art of birding and the species and habitats of Southwest Florida birds.

In addition, guided tours by regional birding experts to birding “hotspots” will allow visitors to explore the birds in their natural environment. Ranging from two to four hours, trips include a sunset cruise at Rookery Bay and an early morning boat cruise through Everglades National Park. Tours will take participants to Sand Dollar Sandbar and Lagoon, Ding Darling National Wildlife Refuge, Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary and Collier-Seminole State Park.

One of only 26 nationally designated Estuarine Research Reserves, the 110,000-acre Rookery Bay Reserve is located at the northern end of Ten Thousand Islands in Collier County, protecting one of the few remaining, relatively undisturbed mangrove estuaries in the nation. The Florida Department of Environmental Protection manages Rookery Bay in cooperation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. For information about Rookery Bay or Florida’s estuaries, visit www.dep.state.fl.us/coastal/. For more about the Friends of Rookery Bay, visit www.rookerybay.org.

‘Pier’ Pressure Promotes Clean Boating

-- Stuart Boat Show attendees pledge to protect the environment --

STUART— Last weekend, Florida boaters made a promise to protect state water resources at the Stuart Boat Show. More than 423 nautical enthusiasts pledged to become Clean Boaters, environmental role models in a statewide initiative that has gained the momentum of more than 8,000 members. “Clean Boaters recognize the value of Florida’s waterways and encourage protection of those resources for the recreational enjoyment of our citizens as well as visitors to our state,” said Department of Environmental Protection Division of Law Enforcement Assistant Director Maury Kolchakian. “Their stewardship helps safeguard the state’s waters and preserve valuable natural resources.”

More than 940,000 vessels are registered in Florida and another 400,000 or more visit the state every year. The Clean Boater initiative educates recreational boaters on simple ways to prevent pollution and preserve the state’s beloved waterways. By educating boaters and improving operations at marine facilities, Florida’s Clean Boating Partnership is helping to ensure a sustainable future for the environment, for boaters and for the billion-dollar marine industry.

“Clean water is the lifeblood of tourism, the marine industry and the boating public in Florida,” said Allison Underwood, Chair of the Clean Boating Partnership. “Our partnership goal is to protect fragile ecosystems while ensuring continued public enjoyment of our waters. By becoming Clean Boaters, citizens can apply ‘pier pressure’ on behalf of the environment.”

The Clean Boating Partnership, which includes the Department of Environmental Protection, marina and boatyard owners and operators, Marine Industries Association of Florida, Florida Sea Grant Program, United States Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary, developed the Clean Boater and Clean Marina Programs to help boaters, marinas and boatyards use environmental practices to preserve Florida’s natural resources. Clean Marina, Clean Boater’s mother program, encourages Florida’s marinas, boatyards and marine retailers to use eco-friendly practices beyond regulation requirements by adopting best management practices. Clean Boaters and all marine patrons are encouraged to look for the Clean Marina

Flag, which denotes an environmentally-conscious marine facility. For more information about the Clean Boating Partnership, visit <http://www.dep.state.fl.us/law/grants/cmp/default.htm>.

Louisiana

Public Meetings Set for Coastal Impact Assistance Program, LA Formulating Plans to use \$540 Million in Energy Act Funds

The Louisiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will host five public meetings to advise the public of the process that the state will use to formulate the plan required by the recently authorized Coastal Impact Assistance Program (CIAP). The new program was authorized by Section 384 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and will provide a total of \$540 million in federal funding to Louisiana during fiscal years 2007 through 2010. At the public meetings, DNR coastal officials will review the plan development process and the evaluation criteria to be used to help funding priorities. The meetings are intended to assist agencies and entities avoid identical project submittals, encourage joint proposals, and outline organized steps in the process and in setting priorities. According to DNR Office of Coastal Restoration and Management Project Manager Greg Grandy, the state will accept project proposals through March 8, 2006.

Coastal Impact Assistance Program funds can only be used for one or more of the following purposes: 1) conservation, restoration and protection of coastal areas, including wetlands; 2) mitigation of damage to fish, wildlife and natural resources; 3) planning assistance and the administrative costs of compliance; 4) implementation of a federally approved marine, coastal, or comprehensive conservation management plan; and 5) mitigation of the impacts of OCS activities through funding of onshore infrastructure projects and public service needs. (No more than 23 percent of the funds received by the state or parish for any one fiscal year can be used for administrative costs or other specified costs). For questions or comments, please contact CIAP Project Managers Will Norman or Greg Grandy at the Louisiana Department of Natural Resources at (225) 342-7308 or www.dnr.louisiana.gov or 225-342-8955.

FEMA Issues \$37 Million in New Grants for Louisiana Recovery

BATON ROUGE, La. -- The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) announced 12 new grants totaling \$37.1 million to help Louisiana communities recovery from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. The grants are part of FEMA's Public Assistance Program and include money for temporary health facilities, repairs to the Superdome, to build schools, and to remove debris. For a listing of grants visit <http://www.fema.gov/news/newsrelease.fema?id=22981>.

Vermilion Group Plans to Build Site to Help Marine Life, Shore

By Richard Burgess, Acadiana bureau; The Advocate newspaper, Baton Rouge, Louisiana

ABBEVILLE, LA — Jan 26, 2005 - The smelly mound of oyster shells rose nearly 10 feet high behind a processing plant in rural Vermilion Parish. And as a front-end loader took big scoops of the shells and piled them into the back of a dump truck Wednesday, Russell Gaspard talked as if the machine were mining gold. It was the first load of shells destined for an oyster reef that Gaspard and others plan to build from scratch by the end of the year. Gaspard hopes the reef, planned for Vermilion Bay, will restore an

oyster fishery to the area, improve other marine life and sap the energy from waves that have been eating away at the bay's shore.

The project has been on the drawing board for about a year. It received a big boost in November when the nonprofit Gulf of Mexico Foundation awarded a \$70,000 grant for the reef work to the Louisiana Wetlands Association, a nonprofit group formed by Gaspard, a retired parish clerk of court, and a circle of friends who meet each morning for coffee at Comeaux's Cafe across from the courthouse in Abbeville. The association — now 50 members strong — took shape last year to host a yearly "wetlands" festival to bring attention to conservation issues, but members soon began looking for a bigger mission. "We had this brand new association, so we needed to do something," said Wayne Touchet, a building contractor and Vermilion Parish police juror who serves as president of the nonprofit group.

The group had no background in marine science, but Touchet said that most members are fishermen and know from experience that oyster reefs, which attract all other sorts of marine life, make a prime spot to drop a line. "Enough with the studying — these folks are doing it," said Ron Dugas, who managed oyster fisheries for the state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries for more than 30 years before retiring. He serves as an informal consultant on the Vermilion Bay project. Dugas, who maintains an Internet "oyster news" archive, said he is not aware of any other inshore reef project under way along the state's coast. He said the practice of returning natural oyster shells to the water bottom to form a reef "is a carryover from the oyster fishermen who have been building reefs like this for more than 100 years. ... You are actually bringing back to the sea what belongs there." The difficulty, he said, is in pulling together enough oyster shells.

Gaspard said he hopes to gather at least 200 cubic yards of shells, about 20 times the large truck load obtained Wednesday from the Pearl Reef Oysters seafood processing plant near Perry. Don's Seafood Hut in Lafayette and Dupuy's Oyster Shop in Abbeville have also agreed to set aside oyster shells for the reef. The shells will be brought to the Port of Vermilion, and — when the pile is large enough — loaded onto a barge and carried out to the site of the proposed reef. The plan is to put down a layer of cracked limestone or concrete and then carry the shells by barge out to the reef site and pile them on top.

If environmental factors cooperate, the structure will naturally attract oyster larvae, which float in the water until finding a suitable reef-like structure to call home, said Earl Melancon, a Nicholls State University marine scientist who specializes in oyster fisheries. As more oysters latch on, the reef naturally grows larger. Melancon said that once an oyster reef is established, it becomes a "community structure" teeming with marine life. Oysters also filter water as they feed, he said, and a large reef structure could dampen the waves that pound away at the receding shoreline.

The proposed site for the reef is near an older reef that was silted decades ago by dirt eroded from the shore, Touchet said. Gaspard said he hopes that oysters can be harvested from the new reef within two years. He said no commercial harvest will be allowed initially, but individuals will be allowed to harvest a small amount for personal use, as long as the oysters are shucked on site and the shells dropped back in the water to help maintain the reef. Gaspard said the reef will be named "Ronney's Reef," in honor of the founding president of the Louisiana Wetlands Association, Ronney Mayard. Mayard, who died in August, was a longtime music educator and arts advocate in Vermilion Parish. He was also an avid fisherman and wrote the grant proposal that won the money for the project. "I can think of no better tribute," said Mayard's widow, Dixie, who came out Wednesday to watch the gathering of the first load of oyster shells for the reef.

The Gulf of Mexico Foundation — <http://www.gulfmex.org>

The Louisiana Oyster Task Force — <http://www.louisianaoysters.org>

Oyster news archive — http://oysterweb.dnr.state.la.us/oyster/_private/rons.htm

Mississippi

FEMA Public Assistance Grants for Education Top \$30 Million in MS

JACKSON, Miss. -- Public assistance funds obligated to help local schools recover from Hurricane Katrina have topped \$30 million in Mississippi, state and federal emergency management officials said today. The grant awards were announced by the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Mississippi Emergency Management Agency (MEMA).

School districts and educational institutions will be able to use the obligated grants to assist with debris removal, rebuilding their schools and for replacement of necessary equipment. Thousands of students of all ages have benefited from FEMA's assistance in getting the schools back on line. FEMA's Public Assistance program continues to work with schools on grants for more projects as the rebuilding effort continues. "Schools are the heart of the community for many throughout Mississippi," said Nick Russo, federal coordinating officer for the Mississippi recovery. "FEMA is proud to be able to help in providing the tools and funds through the Public Assistance program so students can have a safe, comfortable environment to continue to learn." MEMA administers the Public Assistance programs for the state of Mississippi to reimburse eligible entities for costs incurred during disaster response and recovery efforts. Local governments, state agencies and private non-profit organizations across Mississippi use the funds to restore their communities and rebuild critical infrastructure.

Public Assistance grants reimburse not only school districts, but also local governments and certain private non-profit organizations for expenses related to a disaster. Government agencies, special districts and private non-profits can apply for disaster assistance by filing online at www.mississippipa.org. The deadline to apply for Public Assistance is Jan. 29, 2006. For more information about the Public Assistance program and process, please see the Public Assistance Fact Sheet and visit www.fema.gov.

MDEQ Requests Proposals for Engineering Firms to Develop Regional Master Plan

(JACKSON, Miss.) – The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) announced Monday that it is requesting Statements of Qualifications from qualified engineering firms to prepare a comprehensive master plan for the development of regional water, wastewater, and stormwater systems for Jackson, Harrison, Hancock, Pearl River, Stone, and George Counties.

The Governor's Commission on Recovery, Rebuilding, and Renewal recommended a regional approach to restore water and sewer systems and to expand services north of the most intense damage. MDEQ is working with the Mississippi Legislature to craft legislation to institute a regional approach to water, wastewater, and stormwater in accordance with the Commission's recommendations. The Community Development Block Grants funds for this implementation are estimated to be between \$500 million and \$600 million.

"The restoration of South Mississippi requires creative thinking, hard work, and diligent administration of state and federal funds. The Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality is working with local and state officials to restore and enhance the infrastructure and create better systems than existed prior to the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. We encourage engineering firms to submit their proposals and work with us on this most important project," said Charles Chisolm, Executive Director of MDEQ.

The master plan will include the identification of new and expanding infrastructure needed to accommodate the expected demographic changes and the recovery as well as the development and the rehabilitation, repair, and modification of existing systems. The plan will also likely address water, wastewater, and stormwater quality issues prior to the storm, an inventory of existing systems, incorporate existing planning efforts in the six counties, develop recommendations for existing and new systems, and assist in the development of a regional authority.

Texas

General Land Office to Host Second Annual Winter Beach Cleanup Feb. 18

AUSTIN — The Second Annual Winter Beach Cleanup will be held Saturday, February 18 according to Jerry Patterson, Commissioner of the Texas General Land Office. The cleanups will take place at five locations along the Corpus Christi shoreline. “This is an enormous undertaking,” Patterson said. “Among the 48 contiguous states, Texas can boast of having the third-longest coastline. So when volunteers participate in our cleanups during the winter, they do it because they are passionate about preserving and protecting Texas’ beaches. They show a generosity of spirit that makes me proud to be a Texan.”

The Winter Beach Cleanup is coordinated through the Adopt-A-Beach Program of the Texas General Land Office. Registration will begin at 8:30 a.m. The beach cleanups will be from 9 a.m. to noon. Each year, Texas’ beaches receive large amounts of marine debris due to a convergence of currents in the Gulf of Mexico. Since 1986, more than 335,000 Adopt-A-Beach volunteers have picked up more than 6,350 tons of this debris, some of it originating from as far away as Greece. For additional information on the Winter Beach Cleanup and the Adopt-A-Beach Program visit www.texasadoptabeach.org, or contact the GLO at 1-877-TXCOAST.

Other News

Lake Okeechobee Water Pumping Trial Gets Underway

Source: The South Florida Sun-Sentinel; January 9, 2006; Summary By: Stephanie Showalter

Opening arguments were presented in U.S. District Court on January 9, 2006 in a water pollution lawsuit that could have significant ramifications for water projects across the country. The Miccosukee Indian Tribe and several environmental groups filed suit against the South Florida Water Management District to enjoin the District’s practice of pumping water from sugarcane fields into Lake Okeechobee to control flooding and increase lake levels without first obtaining a federal permit under the Clean Water Act (CWA). The District, joined by the Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Sugar Corp., contends that the CWA does not apply because the District is simply moving water from one location to another and no pollutants or contaminants are added. The trial is expected to last about three weeks and be followed by years of appeals.

Louisiana Access Lawsuit Judgment Issued

Schoeffler v. Drake Hunting Club, 2006 La. App. LEXIS 1 (La. App. Jan. 4, 2006).

Five individuals filed suit against a dozen private landowners and lessees who posted no trespassing signs along the waterways of the Atchafalaya Basin. Plaintiffs claimed the owners were impeding their access to waters and banks subject to public use and that the public has a right to fish, hunt, and navigate up to the high water mark along privately owned land. Plaintiffs sought a declaratory judgment to fix property boundaries. The court found that the plaintiffs did not have a right of action to fix such boundaries because they were not owners, lessors, or adverse possessors of the properties at issue. Nor did the plaintiffs have standing to compel the State to make broad declarations on their behalf.

--Opinion available at <http://www.la3circuit.org/opinions/2006/01/010406/05-0499opi.pdf>.

EPA Provides Faster Water Quality Tests for Safe Beach Swimming

(1/25/06) EPA researchers developed a new rapid method for testing beach water quality that will protect Americans' health by reducing the time for detecting bacterial contamination from 24 hours to just two. In tests done at two Great Lakes beaches, researchers verified that the more rapid method accurately predicts possible adverse health effects from bacterial contamination. The results of the study will help support new federal criteria and limits for water quality indicators in recreational waters.

The paper, published in the January 2006 issue of "Environmental Health Perspectives," presents some of the first findings of the National Epidemiological and Environmental Assessment of Recreational (NEEAR) Water Study. NEEAR is a multi-year research project being conducted by EPA and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The first phase of the project assessed the new method in the Great Lakes. The next phase will collect and analyze similar data at ocean beaches.

"This research provides a new DNA-based tool that can be used by Great Lakes beach managers to test the water quality in the morning and make same-day decisions on beach warnings or closing — often before people even go into the water to swim," said George Gray, assistant administrator for the Office of Research and Development. "This tool is an excellent real-world example of how EPA is working to protect the health of people. We can provide them with useful, practical information with which to make decisions that affect their lives and health."

Approximately 89 million Americans enjoy swimming in recreational waters each year. If the water is contaminated with bacteria or other pathogens from sewage, it can lead to unwanted health effects, leading to gastrointestinal, respiratory, eye, and ear illnesses. This study shows a strong link between bacteria (that originates with sewage) identified using the new technology and the health of swimmers.

The research used DNA analysis to quantify two types of bacteria, enterococci and bacteroides, in the water at two beaches on Lake Michigan and Lake Erie. The results of the water quality tests were then correlated to health surveys of beach-goers who swam at the beaches, by interviewing beach goers as they left the beach, and again by telephone 10 to 12 days after their beach visit.

For more information on the NEEAR Water Study, visit the Web at: <http://www.epa.gov/NEEAR/>.

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New Tool for Determining Cause of Ecological Harm to Rivers and Streams

(1/25/06) To improve the nation's waters, EPA has released a new web-based tool, the Causal Analysis/Diagnosis Decision Information System (CADDIS), which simplifies determining the cause of contamination in impaired rivers, streams and estuaries. An impaired body of water does not meet the state or federal water quality standards for one or more pollutants.

More than a thousand U.S. water bodies have been identified as impaired, and in many cases, the cause is unknown. There are many possible sources of pollution such as industrial waste, municipal sewage, agricultural runoff, naturally occurring minerals in rock and sand, and biological materials. Before restorative or remedial actions can be taken, the cause of impairment must be determined. By helping to find the source of contamination, state and local organizations will be better able to implement the Clean Water Act.

CADDIS provides a standardized and easily accessible system to help scientists find, use and share information to determine the causes of aquatic impairment. Causal analyses look at stressor-response relationships, meaning the effect of a specific substance or activity (stressor) on the environment. Typical water stressors include excess fine sediments, nutrients, or toxic substances.

CADDIS was developed by EPA scientists through partnerships with EPA programs and regions, as well as states and tribes. "The development of CADDIS has been an impressive effort and a great example of customer focus by EPA's Office of Research and Development," said Michael Shapiro, deputy assistant administrator in EPA's Office of Water. The version of CADDIS released today is the first of three. Future versions will include modules to quantify stressor-response relationships, and databases and syntheses of relevant literature on sediments and toxic metals. CADDIS is available on EPA's Web pages at: <http://www.epa.gov/caddis>. Contact: Suzanne Ackerman, 202-564-4355 / ackerman.suzanne@epa.gov

Energy

Impact Assessment of Offshore Facilities from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita

NEW ORLEANS – The Minerals Management Service today released its analysis of the effects of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Analysis of the damage assessment data, along with ongoing research requested by the agency, will be incorporated in plans for future hurricane seasons. The Gulf of Mexico, one of the nation's largest sources of oil and gas production, was dealt a one-two punch by these hurricanes, causing destruction and substantial damage to offshore platforms within a four-week period in August and September.

MMS estimates that 3,050 of the Gulf's 4,000 platforms and 22,000 of the 33,000 miles of Gulf pipelines were in the direct path of either Hurricane Katrina or Hurricane Rita. Because of the large amount of infrastructure in the path of hurricane-force winds and waves, the amount of damage was substantial. In comparison with Hurricane Ivan in 2004, Hurricanes Katrina and Rita accounted for considerably more damage because of the paths taken by these two devastating storms. However, there was no loss of life or significant oil spills from wells on the outer continental shelf (OCS) attributed to either storm.

MMS has requested research proposals on six subject areas related to the hurricanes and the damage to offshore oil and gas facilities. The six areas are the following: (1) Assess and evaluate pipeline movement or damage; (2) Assess and evaluate platform damage; (3) Provide hurricane hindcast data; (4) Evaluate and assess the performance of jack-up rigs; (5) Assess methods to eliminate hydrates in pipelines and risers during startups after a hurricane; and (6) Assess the response of waves and currents throughout the water column in the northern Gulf of Mexico slope and shelf.

“The overall damage caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita has shown them to be the greatest natural disasters to oil and gas development in the history of the Gulf of Mexico,” MMS Regional Director Chris Oynes said. He noted, “Just last year, in the devastating Hurricane Ivan, there were seven platforms destroyed, compared with the 115 platforms destroyed in Katrina and Rita.”

One hundred percent of Gulf oil production, which is approximately 1.5 million barrels a day, was shut-in during both storms and 94 percent of gas production, which is 10 billion cubic feet of gas a day, was shut-in during Hurricane Katrina. More than 90 percent of the manned platforms and 85 percent of working rigs were evacuated at one time. Daily production of about 396,000 barrels of oil and about 1.8 billion cubic feet of gas remain shut-in. For a long-term projection, approximately 255,000 barrels a day and 400 million cubic feet of gas a day will probably not be restored to production prior the start of the 2006 hurricane season.

Oynes noted that, “Assessments on pipeline and facility damages are still ongoing, and any updates will be reflected in future releases. It is likely that additional damage will be reported as underwater damage assessments are completed. These have been delayed because of overwhelmed support resources, such as diving equipment, support vessels, and remotely operated vehicles.” Read the full press release at <http://www.gomr.mms.gov/homepg/whatsnew/newsreal/2006/060119.pdf>.

DEP Submits Florida Energy Plan to Governor Bush

-Suite of recommendations to increase energy supply, diversity, efficiency and conservation-

TALLAHASSEE – Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Secretary Colleen M. Castille today submitted to Governor Jeb Bush recommendations for a new comprehensive statewide energy plan. Florida’s Energy Plan addresses the state’s current and future energy needs and outlines proposals for reducing regulatory barriers, diversifying energy sources, encouraging conservation and providing economic incentives to develop alternative energy technology. “Across the nation, the demand for energy and transportation fuel is outpacing supply. Florida must act now to protect the state’s growing economy and quality of life and to overcome the vulnerabilities highlighted by the hurricanes over the last two years,” said Secretary Castille. “Florida’s Energy Plan provides a foundation for securing and diversifying our energy sources and represents a practical and comprehensive step to meet the challenges ahead.” The unprecedented hurricanes of 2004 and 2005 demonstrated Florida’s reliance on imported petroleum products and vulnerability to interruptions in energy production, supply and delivery. By evaluating Florida’s current and future energy supply and demand, the Department developed a suite of recommendations built on the principles of conservation and efficiency, which provide the basis for a far-reaching energy strategy.

“Florida’s Energy Plan charts a course toward energy security through diversification and conservation,” said DEP Deputy Secretary for Regulatory Programs and Energy Mike Sole. “By reducing regulatory barriers and offering economic incentives, Florida can expand its energy portfolio, reduce reliance on imported oil and shape new technologies.” In developing its proposals, the Department adopted two guiding principles: reliance on markets and no new taxes. Instead of mandates, recommendations rely on

the power of the marketplace, using targeted incentives and government's purchasing power to stimulate the free market. For more information or a copy of the plan, visit www.FloridaEnergy.org.

Training and Conferences

Annual Ocean and Coastal Program Managers' Meeting

Start registering now for the Annual Ocean and Coastal Program Managers' Meeting by going to: <http://www.coastalmanagement.noaa.gov/pmm/welcome.html>. Registration forms can be filled out and sent via email from the College of William and Mary Conference Services link on the web site. There is also a link to see and print the draft meeting agenda. We will update the agenda with speaker names as soon as possible. We hope all of you will make flight arrangements to accommodate the Thursday morning plenary from 9:30-11:30am on Planning Perspectives on Hurricane Katrina. We are looking forward to interesting discussions and presentations by invited speakers.

Bacterial Source Tracking: Exploring Bacterial Pollution in Our Waterways

The Mobile Bay NEP partners with many groups, businesses, and agencies to accomplish the actions within the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan. We participate in, partner, and work with many area organizations to conduct informative workshops to various sectors of the community.

Thursday, February 2, 2006 8:30AM to 4:15PM

Cypress Workshop - USA Brookley Campus

[Registration Brochure](#) - pdf file

[Agenda](#) - pdf file

The Coastal Society's 20th Biennial International Conference

The Coastal Society has scheduled its 20th Biennial International Conference for May 13-17, 2006 in St. Petersburg, Florida on the beach. The conference will be held at the Trade Wind Island Resort and will feature a rather extensive technical program along with plenary and special workshops and panel sessions. The conference theme is "Charting a New Course: Shaping Solutions for the Coast."

Location: Tradewinds Resort , St. Pete Beach, Florida, USA

Dates: May 14-17, 2006

Abstract/Proposal Submission Deadline: October 3, 2005

Contact Information: Judy Tucker coastalsoc@aol.com

Home Page URL: <http://www.thecoastalsociety.org/conference/tcs20/index.html>

Restore America's Estuaries (RAE) Call for Sessions, Presentations and Posters

"Forging the National Imperative," the 3rd National Conference on Coastal and Estuarine Habitat Restoration. Dedicated Session proposals are due February 15, 2006. Contributed Presentation proposals are due March 31, 2006. Poster proposals are due April 30, 2006. For more information or to download the application, visit <http://www.estuaries.org/conference>.

60th Interdepartmental Hurricane Conference

The Office of the Federal Coordinator for Meteorological Services and Supporting Research (OFCM) annually hosts the Interdepartmental Hurricane Conference (IHC) to provide a forum for the responsible Federal agencies, together with representatives of the user communities such as emergency management, to review the Nation's hurricane forecast and warning program and to make recommendations on how to improve the program in the future. The major objective is to plan and prepare for the upcoming hurricane season. New procedures, procedural changes, and agreements, which are approved at the conference and are directly related to the provision of tropical cyclone forecast and warning services, are then documented for implementation in the National Hurricane Operations Plan, which is published annually.

The conference will be held at the Riverview Plaza Hotel, Mobile, Alabama, from Monday, March 20 through Friday, March 24, 2006. The theme for this year's conference is Hurricane Season 2006: Building on the Historic 2005 Season. The Registration Deadline is March 6, 2006.

The conference fee is \$175.00. On-line registration at http://www.ofcm.gov/homepage/text/spc_proj/ihc/registration.html.

New Orleans, the Mississippi Delta, and Katrina: Lessons from the Past, Lessons for the Future

New Directions: Science, Humanities, Policy will conduct a three-day workshop in New Orleans March 22-24, 2006 on "New Orleans, the Mississippi Delta, and Katrina: Lessons from the Past, Lessons for the Future." This workshop builds on previous New Directions efforts to promote the integration of ethics and values concerns with scientific and technical knowledge to address pressing societal issues. This workshop will focus on the environmental and societal challenges surrounding New Orleans/Mississippi Delta in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The workshop hypothesis is that scientific and technical knowledge can have a more beneficial societal influence when placed in an interdisciplinary context where the ethics and values dimensions of both knowledge and societal/environmental needs are made explicit.

The workshop will be held at the Center for Bioenvironmental Research, Tulane University New Orleans. For further information, please contact: Erin Daly, Workshop Coordinator, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies University of North Texas daly@unt.edu.

Did you find this edition useful? Please send suggestions, comments, and new items for publication to Laurie.Rounds@noaa.gov